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SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS:
A Move to Multilateralism in a Unilateral World

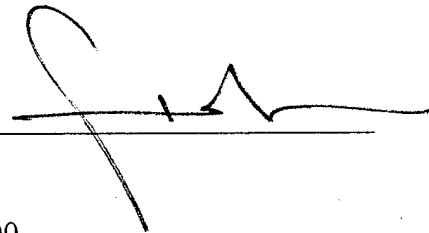
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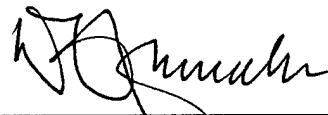
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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS: A MOVE TO MULTILATERALISM IN A UNILATERAL WORLD

A "wave of democracy" has swept through Latin America and the Caribbean Basin. In order to keep pace with the changing environment, *multilateralism* has replaced the historic unilateral stance with regard to U.S. policy in the region. Within this philosophical framework, the U.S. Southern Command's approach to peacetime engagement requires that all U.S. sponsored exercises and operations are multilateral in nature. This new approach to multilateral-only training and operations will improve military-to-military interaction throughout the Americas, and complement future political, social and economic relationships in the region. It will also help to offset the reduction of deployed U.S. forces, the closing of bases in Panama, and the decline of U.S. and theater-wide military budgets.

For the past two centuries the U.S. has controlled the reins of economic, political, and military power in the Americas. This domination has included a security relationship that has ebbed and flowed dependent upon current U.S. strategic objectives. Over the years, bilateral, and a few minor multilateral agreements have been fused; however, typically U.S. actions have been shaped by policies, direction and conduct which were unilateral in nature. The majority of these actions have been attributed to U.S. "Cold War" requirements of global and hemispheric security. But today, in the wake of a "democratic revolution" which has swept through this region, the U.S. is modifying its strategic perspective in order to take advantage of the transition. From a Cold War fear of communist insurgencies, the emphasis has been altered to low intensity conflicts, peace operations and cooperative security with the over-riding goal of economic prosperity.

This new perspective complements the U.S. Department of Defense's revision of the Unified Command Plan (UCP) which nearly doubles the size of the U.S. Southern Command.¹ This theater has now inherited the Caribbean basin and adjacent waters of Central and South America. It stretches from the waters of Northern Florida beyond the tip of Tierra del Fuego, encompassing over 12 million square miles and a population well over 400 million people. At the same time, the U.S. has pulled its troops out of Panama, decreased budgets in the region, and reduced its number of forward-deployed forces. The regional CINC in charge of promoting U.S. policy and maintaining security has conveyed his strategy of "cooperative regional peacetime engagement" which outlines a strategic and philosophical approach for this century. As one of the strategic aims to combat threats in the region, the CINC has keyed upon "strengthening and expanding" multilateral security cooperation. This includes a new approach to conducting

multilateral-only training and operations with the armed forces of Latin America and the Caribbean. *This paper examines the potentiality of this strategy within the U.S Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) Theater. It seeks to answer whether the move to multilateralism, specifically multilateral-only training and operations, effectively contributes to attaining U.S. policy goals. It will also search for the "next step"; as an option for future hemispheric security.*

U.S. PERSPECTIVE

What are the Hemispheric Objectives and Threats?

The main pillars of U.S. national security strategy in the Western Hemisphere are to sustain democracy, promote prosperity and enhance security.² Maintaining democracy in the region will remain the primary U.S. objective, as democratic governments are stated to be the cornerstone of regional stability. Most politicians and military leaders boast of only one lone holdout in the region, namely Cuba. However, some of these democracies are young and fragile, and many do not resemble "true democracies" in the template of the United States. Still, they are all freely elected civilian governments, which the U.S. must consider individually as it attempts to promote its policies with a broad-brush stroke.

This being said, the political atmosphere in the region has improved dramatically since the 1970's and 1980's, and with continued positive foreign policy efforts, will continue long into the future. To ensure democracy and combat the principal security concerns, multilateral programs throughout the region are being pursued. "Our efforts to encourage multilateral cooperation are enhancing confidence and security within the

region and will help expand our cooperative efforts to combat the transnational threats to the Western Hemisphere.”³

The primary transnational threat the White House articulates is the rising and resilient illegal drug trade. Other transnational threats, some of which are influenced by the war on drugs, such as organized crime, international terrorism, arms smuggling, subversion, environmental depletion, and illegal migration, also contribute to instability in the region. In addition, extra-hemispheric influences, primarily from Europe (arm sales) and China (political influence), hamper the region’s progress toward strict democratic values and economic prosperity. Further complicating matters are cross-border rivalries and long-standing cultural perceptions that lead to mistrust, causing most countries to build defenses rather than share information. Excessive maritime claims, portending confrontations over fishing stocks and off-shore mineral rights, place pressure on regional cooperation, as well. And, finally, education and human rights, pivotal necessities for overall improvement in quality of life, are far from being adequate.

What is SOUTHCOM’s Answer to Implement U.S. Policy?

The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is focusing on multilateral exercises and operations, to train, educate and influence Latin American and Caribbean security forces and militaries. The vision entails “nations capable of and supportive of multilateral responses to challenges...”⁴ The number one peacetime engagement tool is the conduct of exercises, complemented by combined training. These programs support 36 of the 52 objectives in the Theater Engagement Plan.⁵ “In the past [SOUTHCOM] conducted a great number of exercises, but many of them were bilateral. Today, as a matter of policy we conduct no bilateral exercises. Our objective is to migrate from

regional, to inter-regional exercises, and ultimately to hemispheric efforts.”⁶ These multilateral events are vital to addressing the CINC’s engagement focus areas of counterdrug efforts, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, improving/maintaining military professionalism, halting illegal migration, and promoting democracy.

The exercises are divided among the three categories of operational, engineering, and foreign military interaction (FMI). Operational exercises such as *Blue Advance*, *Ellipse Echo*, and *Fuertes Defensas* are carried out in order to gauge a U.S. CONPLAN’s effectiveness and the participants’ ability to militarily coordinate towards agreed upon goals. These can include noncombatant evacuation, counterterrorism, protection of the Panama Canal, disaster relief and migrant operations. Engineering exercises, predominantly *New Horizons*, provide humanitarian and civic assistance for infrastructure improvement in underdeveloped regions. These exercises, added to medical, dental, and veterinary support deployments, tackle many of the social issues that can lead to economic stagnation and political instability. And finally, FMI exercises such as *Cabanas* (peacekeeping), *Tradewinds* (counterdrug), and *UNITAS* (hemispheric defense) are multinational events that promote systems interoperability, military decision-making, and after-action discussions. Due to the dynamic mix of sub-regional threats, cultural diversity, and historical relationships, the operations and exercises may appear at times sub-regionally focused and divergent; however, all return to the basic formula: multilateral application equals regional cooperative stability.

Successful real-world multilateral operations have also been conducted and are currently being conducted in the region. “The Military Observer Mission Ecuador/Peru (MOMEPE) may become the historic example of effective multinational peacekeeping.”⁷

In early 1995, an age old border dispute erupted between Ecuador and Peru. During a six week period over 100,000 troops were mobilized and over 300 casualties were suffered on both sides. At the behest of the warring governments, a peacekeeping force consisting of Brazilian, Argentine, Chilean and U.S. troops, and under operational command (OPCON) of a Brazilian General, was dispatched to the area to create a demilitarized zone and end the skirmish. The success of this effort was due to the unprecedented cooperation among the political and military entities involved, as well as, the inherent understanding of the situation by the MOMEF peacekeepers. Further multilateral security operations that are ongoing in the region range from counterdrug interdiction to land mine clearing to disaster relief to election security.

How has SOUTHCOM's Focus Changed (since Cold War)?

“...From the Kennedy administration onwards... the U.S. strategic policy toward the Western Hemisphere was remarkably consistent. It retained an anticommunist, counter-insurgency focus under the U.S. nuclear and conventional military umbrella, with an emphasis upon the U.S. pursuing a unilateral, rather than multilateral, approach to military intervention and collective security.”⁸ As U.S. hemispheric strategy has slowly transitioned from a Cold War outlook, the U.S. strategic perspective has been dramatically modified to profit from renewed regional stability. At the same time, an area of responsibility that only a few years ago was concerned with just Central and South America proper, has taken on a three-dimensional aspect. It is no longer co-sponsored by U.S Atlantic Command and U.S. Southern Command, but placed under one hat to ensure consistency and efficiency. “The last two revisions to the UCP have significantly altered not only the content but really the cultural character of the SOUTHCOM area of

responsibility...this had very much been a continental theater, a domain for armies....now it is a much more balanced theater. It has maritime, it has continental, and it has aerospace concerns.”⁹ Although this is a significantly larger theater, the CINC must still compete with other regional CINC’s for precious and often scarce U.S. military funding and resources to implement U.S. policy. These fiscal, political and military realities have caused the CINC to reshape SOUTHCOM’s strategic approach.

Other Avenues Leading to Multilateralism

Long established, as well as recently-commissioned multilateral vehicles, form a framework for promoting peacetime engagement and conflict prevention. To varying degrees, SOUTHCOM sponsors, directly contributes to, or indirectly supports these agencies and programs. The Organization of American States (OAS), chartered in 1948, is the umbrella organization that provides a forum for addressing all needs of the Western Hemisphere, from military intervention to environmental concerns. An example of recent OAS commitment to multilateral military efforts is Resolution 1080. Passed in 1991, the resolution decrees “collective action against interruption of a government that came into being via legitimate means.”¹⁰ This has resulted in multilateral support for interventions in Haiti, Peru, and Guatemala in the early 1990’s, and was used more recently to negotiate an end to the Ecuador-Peruvian border dispute in 1995. Pre-dating the OAS and later absorbed into it, the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) is the longest standing multilateral military organization in the world. Although its role in hemispheric security is being reviewed by the OAS, the IADB de-mining project in Central America is a good example of a focused response of multilateral military assistance. The 1982 Regional Security System (RSS) in the Eastern Caribbean promoting anticommunist

collective security and the Central American Security Commission (CASC) established in 1990 as a forum for arms control and verification, are other attempts to address particular concerns in sub-regions of the Americas. In addition, the Defense Ministry of the Americas, an offshoot of the Summit of the Americas, was formed in 1995 in order to allow defense ministries from all democratically elected governments in the Hemisphere to meet and discuss regional security concerns and conflict prevention. Beyond these institutional forums are military educational avenues such as the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, the Inter-American Defense College, the Inter-American Air War College, and the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies, that provide "democratically based" curriculum to future leaders of southern theater militaries. In addition, Personnel Exchange Programs (PEP) with hemispheric countries and inter-exchange programs to national war colleges promote understanding and cooperation among military professionals.

THE "SOUTHERN" PERSPECTIVE

Legacy

The primary threats facing Latin America and the Caribbean are not necessarily viewed in the same framework from South looking North as from North looking South. Much of this perspective is the result of the Cold War legacy, and especially its impact on democracy and civil-military relations, that hasn't fully receded from Latin society and politics. Compared to a mature democracy such as the United States which has cemented its institutions throughout more than 200 years, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have been democratic for less than 20 years. Therefore, although there may be agreement on the importance of democracy, it may not necessarily follow a strict North

American “architecture.” This includes varying opinions on the role of the military in society. “There are many differences between the North American vision and the different Latin American visions on the role of the military inside their own states.”¹¹ These include the position that the armed forces take in the political hierarchy, their specific functions in society, and their role in maintaining the state’s “nationality.” This is a very complex issue as countries move towards the subordination of militaries to civilian authority. Secondly, the fact that any proposal from a U.S. perspective, whether it be military, political, or economic, is not quickly embraced, but rather viewed warily - at least initially - by Latin American and Caribbean leadership. These initiatives are often seen as self-seeking, simplistic and intrusive to the autonomies of the nations. A prime example regards U.S. drug policy in which the Latin Americans have consistently viewed the problem as simply a product of the enormous demand in the United States. These feelings intensified during the Bush administration’s “war on drugs” in which it portrayed the drug producers and traffickers as the “center of gravity.” This stance has been modified by the Clinton administration to attack both the supply and demand sides of the equation; however, U.S. policy still dominates the agenda. In essence, not all ideas are good ideas just because they originate in the United States, not to mention that the U.S. has a reputation in the region for being uninformed, self-righteous, and politically fickle.

What Inhibits Multilateral Military Cooperation?

The primary challenge to multilateral cooperation among “southern” militaries rests with the regional power balance, actual or perceived, in theater. Cross border rivalries and traditional disputes have led to distrust resulting in “arms creep” in order to defend one’s boundaries. For example, a purchase of Belarus MIG-29’s by Peru in 1995 resulted

in Ecuador acquiring Israeli Kfir C-7's just to maintain a status quo with its neighbor.¹² It also influenced Chile's discreet support to the United Kingdom in the Falkland Islands War against their main rival, Argentina. Therefore, transparency and accountability concerning military equipment and information would alleviate much of the suspicion between countries, and thus, encourage multilateral cooperation.

Secondly, the strong arm of the United States is acutely sensed throughout the region. This omnipresent force has always been poised to separate parties and mitigate interstate tension when deemed necessary to support U.S. policy. This fact is understood, but not always warmly embraced by regional leaders. As U.S. efforts transition to multilateral commitment, policy choices require extensive consideration of southern viewpoints.

Thirdly, the success of multilateral military exercises depends not only on their ability to meet actual, perceived, and potential threats in the region, but also relies on the interaction and cooperation among diversely trained and equipped military organizations. The coordination of these events is often time consuming and frustrating. "To try to coordinate just within the Venezuelan military is incredibly frustrating. Even after the planning concludes, the exercise is often delayed or canceled by a whim of one of the commanders. It is often apparent that their goals differ from ours."¹³

However, in some instances just getting militaries in the field, out to sea, or in the air is enough to begin the step toward a more involved and lasting relationship. This often means resorting to the lowest common denominator when it comes to technology. For example, an air-delivery mining exercise in Uruguay relied on computer driven releases from a U.S. P-3 aircraft and smokes dropped out of a hole built into the floor of a Uruguayan aircraft.¹⁴ However, the intangible aspects such as inter-service planning,

asymmetric form flying, and communicating with Spanish-speaking air controllers, cannot be conducted anywhere except in the field. At times, these small and apparently diverse events form the basis for military relationships that can accomplish required hemispheric security goals.

Status of Latin American and Caribbean Military Forces

Central American and the Caribbean nations have never had substantial military forces of any kind and in the past have often counted on U.S. support to combat internal conflicts. In fact, one of the benefits provided to those participants supporting recent U.S. operations in Haiti was in security assistance hardware for future use by their militaries and security forces. South America, of course, has the preponderance of forces and hardware in the region with Argentina, Brazil, and Chile the dominant leaders. However, all of the region's militaries have been substantially downsized as government military spending has declined in favor of economic agendas. Military expenditures per annum have hovered between 1-2% of GDP for the past 10 years compared to 7-9% in the 1980's.

This is not necessarily a bad omen, the only caution being that a substantially weakened military can foster internal insecurity, not to mention, place military leadership with its political back to the wall. However, as democracy spreads and economic prosperity becomes the focus, the civilian-military model is adopting a U.S. stance. For example, Brazil became the last member of MERCOSUR, the South American customs union whose members were formerly military dictatorships, to place its armed forces under full formal civilian control.

Concerning technology, the U.S. has often tended to turn its back on Latin America when it came to modernizing and providing military equipment. After a 20-year ban on the sale of advanced military technologies, the Clinton administration finally reversed U.S. policy in 1998. "The United States should engage and promote responsible sales in order to increase our participation in the region and promote interoperability without sacrificing democratic rule and hemispheric peace and security."¹⁵ These conventional arms transfers can be viewed as a legitimate instrument of peace as they increase the inter-operable effectiveness of regional militaries. This, of course, hasn't meant that Latin American militaries have gone without technological update. Most have turned to Europe and Israel to purchase equipment that is now incompatible with current U.S. inventories. "American companies have been kept out of the market for some time...there was a void that [the Israelis] have filled successfully".¹⁶ Although there is debate on whether the U.S. policy change is solely linked to a sincere desire for hardware compatibility, or mere political lobbying from the U.S. military industry, it is another reversal of U.S. unilateral policy that will benefit multilateral cooperation.

THE NEXT STEP

An Option for the Future

As a global power, U.S. national security policy must take into account every region of the world. Though the U.S. military at current levels may be capable of confronting two major regional contingencies (MRC) at the same time, it does not possess sufficient resources to influence or intervene in all potential world crises. The U.S., in a future scenario consisting of a lesser regional contingency (LRC) in the Western Hemisphere, whether it be peace operations, humanitarian assistance, or a

regional conflict, while contending with other emergencies overseas, may not have the ability or political will to commit extensive military forces in this theater. In such circumstances, the region would benefit from its own well-trained and well-equipped Latin American and Caribbean forces that could quell instability, confront natural disasters, or provide regional security. In that context, a good starting point is to build on the experience and relationships gained throughout the 40 years of Navy-to-Navy operations in UNITAS. Maritime forces have a legacy of peacetime, as well as, wartime roles. With multilateralism as the cornerstone philosophy, there should be development of an operational concept of a hemispheric defense force such as a Standing Naval Forces America (SNFA) led by one of the larger regional navies on a rotational basis. The force could be complemented, as required, by multinational ground forces for in-country troop requirements. This effort would commit fewer U.S. forces, as well as financial resources to the region, but still allow the U.S. to provide military influence. It would also allow the U.S. to concentrate its main military force in other parts of the world where more serious interests may lie. Furthermore, it would promote regional responsibility and allow those with a better understanding of the political and social dynamics of the region to resolve its matters. In recent history, we have seen the result of multilateral military cooperation in resolving the border dispute between Ecuador and Peru.¹⁷ We have witnessed Argentina providing forces to UN operations in the Persian Gulf, as well as, being touted as a "major non-NATO ally."¹⁸ We have observed the U.S. taking a subordinate military leadership role in MOMEF. Separately, these examples demonstrate a new way of operating; together they perhaps portray the future for regional security. Although a continuous, functional regional cooperative security force may not be fiscally

feasible in the current economic climate, the prospects are more promising today than in the past. Important steps can now be taken at the national level to support mutual security goals and adapt to new threats in the region. The world is changing rapidly, and there may be a time when such a force becomes the solution in this hemisphere.

CONCLUSIONS

SOUTHCOM's move to a policy of multilateral-only training and operations is a significant contribution to the political, economic, and diplomatic efforts that implement U.S. national policy objectives in the Western hemisphere. In a broader sense, it provides four key ingredients to benefit U.S. policy. First and foremost, it presents the U.S. with an opportunity to influence theater governments and militaries with fundamental democratic principles while also maintaining regional stability. This stability strengthens the "democratic revolution" in the Americas that, in turn, will foster economic prosperity. Next, it accentuates an "openmindedness" in U.S. policy application as it emphasizes the importance of southern partners in defining, developing, and securing future political, economic, and security objectives. In other words, it provides the basis for a renewed look at U.S. obligations and commitments that share Latin American and Caribbean goals. Third, it attenuates the Cold War legacy of U.S. unilateralism while building upon traditional hemispheric relationships. It substitutes a future partnership in the pursuit of hemispheric objectives, for a once heavy-handed, paternalistic approach to executing a strict U.S. agenda. Although latent suspicions undoubtedly will remain for some time, consistency in this new application will open up substantial opportunities. And finally, it counters to some degree the reduction in forward-deployed U.S. military forces, especially with the withdrawal from Panama. Although, the U.S. continues

diplomatically to arrange forward basing rights in countries such as Ecuador, Honduras, and Aruba, these are only temporary forward operating locations (FOL), and not long-term presence.

Focusing on military aspects alone, the change to multilateral-only training and operations provides five advantages to the region. First, it furnishes a quantitative and qualitative measure of allied capabilities in the region, such as training levels, material condition of equipment, and technological advancement. It also provides a gauge in measuring the will of governments and militaries to commit assets in a timely manner to events as they occur. Second, it conforms to the fiscal realities of lower budgets for all regional militaries. The sharing of costs whether it be man, material, or money, is a tremendous advantage to all participants. Some would argue that eliminating exercises altogether would save more; however, military interaction is a perishable skill that cannot be placed on the shelf. Continuous interaction and training pays big dividends when lives are at stake in future confrontations. Third, it obligates Latin American and Caribbean nations to look beyond self-fulfilling and self-promoting policies towards regional, and even global, concerns. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay and Venezuela have all been involved in extra-regional and inter-regional operations over the last decade.¹⁹ These events lead to a better understanding of global concerns and perhaps a reorientation of national strategies that favor external cooperative security vice internal defense. Fourth, it enhances stability through mutual trust and military-to-military contacts. This increases the transparency, accountability and mutual cooperation in the purchase of military hardware, weapons inventories, and troop movements. It also provides for lasting friendships and mutual respect among military officers that can pay benefits in

future crises. For example, in 1986, a Colombian warship entered disputed waters in the Gulf of Venezuela that almost resulted in a naval fire-fight. The tense situation was defused by the CNO's of both navies who had once worked together as commanders during a UNITAS exercise.²⁰ And finally, it builds a basis for future cooperative security arrangements in defense of threats to the hemisphere. An excellent example is *Operation Conquistador* that was conducted in March 2000. This counterdrug operation involved the cooperation of 25 nations in the Caribbean, Central, and South America and resulted in over 2300 arrests and the seizure of 10,000 pounds of cocaine.²¹ This is a landmark coalition arrangement that transcended the lines of interagency organizations, security forces, police, and militaries in the region, and perhaps most important, conveyed U.S. trust in our regional allies by sharing high level U.S. intelligence information.

Conceptual differences still remain that will need to be continually addressed. These include the U.S. views toward Cuba, the U.S. unilateral policies to wage the "war on drugs", and the residual persisting fear in the region of U.S. hegemony. This being said, the SOUTHCOM strategy invoking multilateral-only participation and cooperative security is an important milestone that will foster mutual understanding and build an informed basis for dealing with whatever situations are threatening regional stability.

¹ The 1995 revision of the UCP added the Atlantic and Pacific waters adjacent to Central America; The 1997 revision added the islands of the Caribbean.

² The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, December 1999, 39-40.

³ Ibid, 40.

⁴ General Charles Wilhelm, USMC, quoted in unclassified USSOUTHCOM Theater Engagement Plan (TEP) brief, December 1999.

⁵ Obtained from unclassified USSOUTHCOM TEP brief, December 1999.

⁶ General Charles Wilhelm, USMC, "Posture Statement", March 1999.

⁷ Glenn R. Weidner, "Operation Safe Border", *Joint Force Quarterly*, Spring 1996, 53.

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- ⁸ Paul G. Buchanan, "U.S. Defense policy for the Western Hemisphere", Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs, Spring 1996, 5.
- ⁹ General Charles Wilhelm, USMC, quoted in interview in Jane's Defense Weekly, December 1998.
- ¹⁰ Charter of the Organization of American States.
- ¹¹ Professor Luis Bitencourt Emilio of Brazil quoted in the Strategic Studies Institute Conference Report, The Role of the Armed Forces in the Americas, (Carlisle barracks, PA - April 1998), 94.
- ¹² Frank O. Mora, "U.S. Arms Transfer Policy for Latin America", Air Power Journal, Spring 1999, 7.
- ¹³ Quote from Major, USMC, Foreign Area Officer, April 2000.
- ¹⁴ Mission conducted by author during UNITAS 1997.
- ¹⁵ President Clinton quoted in Mora, 3.
- ¹⁶ Israeli Military Industry Senior Executive quoted in Air Power Journal, Spring 1999, 2.
- ¹⁷ The Military Observer Mission Ecuador/Peru (MOMEPE) consisted of troops and negotiators from Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the U.S.
- ¹⁸ Mora, 4.
- ¹⁹ The multinational operations conducted were in Nicaragua, Persian Gulf, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Haiti.
- ²⁰ LCDR John J. Shea, USN, UNITAS: Supporting U.S. Policy in Latin America, JMO Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, June 1997.
- ²¹ Story printed in CNN.com, news article, "Multination Drug Sweep Nets 2,331 Arrests", 29 Mar 2000.

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